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Beloved Enemies: Our Need for Opponents

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Beloved Enemies: Our Need for Opponents, by David P. Barash. Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1994. 309 pp. \$25.95 cloth. ISBN 0-87975-908-9.

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My experience of reading the book *Beloved Enemies: Our Need for Opponents*, written by David P. Barash, was one of contradictory thoughts and feelings. Barash offers a paradigm for understanding and explaining the seeming proclivity that humans have to divide the world into polarized constructs of "us" versus "them," "good" versus "bad," etc. He asserts that we seem to "need" to have "opponents," or "enemies," to help us define who "we" are, to focus on something external in the service of quelling or redirecting our deepest internal fears, pain and uncertainty. He suggests, "Virtually whenever it appears, excessive enmity can be traced to pain, injury, loss, and rage" (p. 208). He suggests that humans engage in a competition and "enemy making" not only for biological and psychological reasons, but also for important sociological reasons. He argues, "the underlying functions of groups is to identify members of other groups as different from themselves. . . . They exaggerate any existing differences, partly in the service of getting a firmer grip on who they are themselves" (p.89).

Barash suggests that this way of "seeing" the world has many unfortunate ramifications, such as *ipso facto* "creating" enemies where none actually exist, which can then lead to very real but unnecessary violence, conquest, and also a sort of "self-destruction." Barash calls on useful metaphors such as Melville's Ahab, whose "quest for revenge almost literally devoured him, just as a malignant tumor might have done" (p. 209).

Barash describes several contexts where he sees evidence of this process. For example, he cites the "description" of enmity that Americans have rendered to leaders such as Hitler, Tojo, Mussolini, Mao, Ho Chi Minh and Milosovic — in part to satisfy a collective need for opponents. He asserts, ". . . not only do we need an enemy, and not only do we tend to exaggerate this enemy and dehumanize it, but we also insist that this enemy have at least a recognizable face, typically the face of a leader through whom national identity — and antagonism — is filtered, and in whose image a complex welter of aspirations and antagonisms are congealed and personified" (p. 44).

Herein lies, for me, some of the difficulty that I have in fully embracing the author's thesis. I agree with him that only rarely "do we seriously consider our own role in the process, the degree to which we may have created these enemies by our own self-righteous insistence that we are right and they wrong" (p. 45). I also tend to believe that "enemy" might be a useful

distinction to ascribe to an "other," whether it is a home intruder or a country's aggressive neighbor who is violating borders through violence. The author's bias is clearly demonstrated in that he reduces an array of group, national, and international events to his constructed dualism, when, in my view, these events are often far more complex or contradictory. For example, "others" often behave like enemies, and this is not merely a construction that we create to divert attention from "in-group" divisiveness or to satisfy other needs. So, while second order cybernetics informs us that we are always part of the system that we are observing, that our own lens creates some of the "reality" that we "see," and the author highlights the destructive ramifications of operating within the confines of an "enemy system," he fails to take into account the extent to which his own lens has shaped "evidence" to fit his paradigm.

Notwithstanding this criticism, I believe that the author is on to something with which we have seemingly made little progress. That is, is it moral and even utilitarian to create and exaggerate distinctions over difference when there is often more commonality in characteristics and purpose between groups? Can we rise above this seeming tendency, when it does exist? Or, is our persistent description of "enemy" some of the "water" that the proverbial fish can never seem to see because it is so immersed in it? We need more conversation about this!

Mending The Torn Fabric: For Those Who Grieve and Those Who Want to Help Them, by Sarah Brabant. Amityville, NY: Baywood. Death, Value and Meaning Series, 1996. 162 pp. \$28.95 cloth. ISBN 0-89503-141-8.

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Mending The Torn Fabric makes an important contribution to our understanding of the grief process. Written with a sociological perspective, this effective and compassionate book helps to clarify the multilayered, multifaceted impact of a loved one's death. Brabant writes in a personal and engaging style that makes the subject matter easily accessible. The purpose of the book is to provide guidelines and insights within a recognizable framework that will aid those affected by death to make their way through the difficult and sometimes lengthy process of mending. Drawing from professional and personal experience, the author's insights serve surviving loved ones as well as those who want to support and encourage them, lay persons and practitioners alike. The book flows from its initial explanation of the torn fabric analogy and tools for mending, to its later chapter directed to those who want to be of help. The concluding chapter addresses the professional's interest in the book's theoretical foundations. Throughout,